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ABSTRACT

Trade books offer both teachers and students a basic learning tool that can help make learning in the content areas more personal and meaningful. Teachers can use trade books as background reading, for planning units of study, as resource materials in teaching, and as part of the total reading program. Students can use trade books for research purposes and for reading enjoyment and enrichment. Trade books aid teachers by providing a variety of topics for a wide range of student abilities. They also give teachers autonomy in selecting materials for instruction. Students also benefit when trade books are used in content area teaching. Regardless of students' reading interests, reading levels, or maturity, there are usually trade books available to serve students' individualized needs. Since trade books offer something for everyone, they can help stimulate student participation in classroom discussions, offering a variety of viewpoints and unique contributions to the subject area. (RL)

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TRADE BOOKS: USES AND BENEFITS FOR CONTENT AREA TEACHING

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Children's books can throw new light on the study of every content area (Robertson 1975), enrich students' understanding of almost every subject area from art to physical education (Troy 1977), and become a source of further reading based on the interest aroused by classroom activities and units of study (Noyce 1979). Billig (1979) recommends that children's literature be used as a springboard to the content areas, while Noyce (1979) has discovered that trade books can provide enriching experiences for children in classroom learning centers and individualized reading programs in all content areas. Troy (1977) further suggests the use of trade books as a solution to the problem of materials, methods and interest in reading, whereas Chan (1976) views children's literature as a tremendous source for meaningful content in teaching the subject areas.

USES FOR TRADE BOOKS IN THE CONTENT AREAS

Teacher Uses

Teachers often use trade books in the following ways: (1) As background reading, (2) In planning units of study, (3) As resource material in teaching, and (4) As part of the total reading program.

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As background reading. Children's books are often used by adults who want to become acquainted with a new subject and who want to learn about this new-found interest in the easiest, quickest way possible. For example, an adult interested in learning to play chess may first consult Chess for Children by Raymond Bott and Stanley Morrison (Collins 1970) for an initial introduction to the fundamentals of chess written at a level understandable to both children and adults. After this initial introduction to the subject, an adult level book may be consulted.

In planning units of study. Teachers often consult children's books in planning units for social studies, science or health. The concepts in trade books are written at the children's level of understanding and can be easily adapted to any grade level. A variety of children's books provide both depth and breadth on any given topic for the teacher. By consulting children's books, many points of view on a subject or topic can be considered, as compared to only one point of view from a textbook. Thus, a teacher can decide what focus the unit will take, or what aspect of a topic will be emphasized.

As resource material in unit teaching. An attractive display of children's books mingled with artifacts and realia are an excellent way to launch a new unit of study. Children's books may also be used at interest centers, at resource centers, and as reference materials for units to be studied. Although standard reference materials such as encyclopedias and almanacs are useful, trade books offer a greater variety of viewpoints and meet the varied and special interests that students have on a topic. Assigned readings may be made in trade books as a unit progresses, and using trade books for research purposes is not uncommon.

As part of the total reading program. Trade books can be used throughout the school day: During the instructional reading period, trade books can be used as part of an individualized reading program or as an extension of a basal reading program; during the functional reading program in the content areas, trade books can supplement and enrich textbook reading; during the recreational reading program, trade books can be read for enjoyment and to provide practice in the reading skills and content knowledge learned throughout the school day.

Student Uses

Students' use of trade books range from (1) Using it as a tool for learning, (2) Using it for research purposes, to (3) Using it in reading for enjoyment and enrichment.

As a tool for learning. Using trade books helps students get away from the idea that textbooks are the only source of information, and that much can be learned from both fiction and nonfiction materials. Because trade books contain information that is both specialized and detailed, students are aided in their study of a particular topic because the subject is handled in greater depth and detail. In addition, the illustrations in trade books are usually greater in numbers and in greater detail. The art work not only aids in capturing the essence of a topic, but it also provides the necessary details for learning about a subject.

For research purposes. Most content area textbooks contain many topics on a given subject. Trade books, on the other hand, are usually written on one specific topic. The author's research and writing on one specific topic allows for a more thorough treatment of a subject. As a result, trade books go into greater detail than a textbook. By its very nature,

a textbook can provide only a summary of information, carefully selected, and compressed because of the limitations on length or size of the volume.

For enrichment and enjoyment. Reading from trade books enriches the basic information gained from reading content area textbooks. For example, learning about an event in history through historical fiction makes the information more appealing and interesting; thus a subject or personality comes alive for the reader. The information in tradebooks is often presented from a particular point of view and the characters in a story are portrayed more realistically. For example, in the volume The Sports of Our Presidents tells about the favorite games that past presidents enjoyed playing as children. Viewing presidents as they were as children and in view of the games that they once enjoyed playing makes these historical figures more realistic and human. Studying a subject through trade books can make learning more enjoyable.

BENEFITS DERIVED FROM USING TRADE BOOKS

Teacher Benefits

Trade books aid teachers in (1) Providing for a wide range of student abilities, (2) Providing a variety of topics from which to teach, and (3) Autonomy in selecting materials for instruction.

Providing for a range of student benefits. Although the use of multi-level textbooks is frequently recommended (Lunstrom and Taylor, 1978), it is not always possible to find textbooks which are written on a given topic with varying levels of reading difficulty. Trade books can be part of the answer to this problem. A Student can select a trade book on a given topic, written at his reading level. Library books can provide for a variety of reading

abilities because books on the same subject are often available at varying levels of reading difficulty. For example, on the topic of ocean life, the reading difficulty level based on the Spache Readability Formula (1974) may range from 1.8 for True Book of Oceans (Carter 1958), 3.2 for True Book of Animals of Sea and Shore (Podendorf 1956), 4.4 for Oceans (Adler 1962), 5.7 for Animals of the Sea (Verite 1968), to a higher reading difficulty level of 8.0 for Seas (Backhouse 1969). Thus, a unit on ocean life in science offers reading material for students of all reading ability levels.

Providing a variety of topics on the same subject. Due to space limitations, textbooks can focus only on the important aspects of a topic. In contrast, a collection of trade books can offer a greater variety of topics, written in depth, on a given subject. For example, on the subject of communications--which might be just one chapter in a social studies textbook--there are many tradebooks, including Talking Without Words (Ets 1968), True Book of Communications (Miner 1960), Linda's Airmail Letter (Bell 1964), I Know a Telephone Operator (Evans 1971), From Scrolls to Satellites: The Story of Communication (Wise 1970). From this collection of trade books, a student quickly learns that there is more to the topic of communication than that which a chapter in a textbook could adequately handle.

Autonomy in selecting materials for instruction. The use of trade books allows a teacher the freedom to choose what she wants to use in her teaching. She is also able to determine the content and focus of the unit being planned. In contrast, when textbooks are used, selections are generally made by state or district textbook selection committees and the teacher rarely has a voice in its selection. In addition, the content of a textbook is usually predetermined by its authors. By using trade books, a teacher is better able to personalize her teaching because she is able to focus in on the interests and needs of her students.

Student Benefits

There are several benefits to students when trade books are used for content area teaching: (1) There is usually something for every student, regardless of his interests, reading ability or maturity, and (2) They have something unique to contribute to class discussions and group projects.

Something for everyone. Regardless of a student's special interest on a topic, his reading level, or his maturity, there is usually a trade book which he can read and from which he can learn. Each student is comfortable reading something at his reading level and on an interest of his own choosing. In contrast, textbooks generally offer every reader the same "diet" of information and disregards a student's reading ability because one book is used for all students.

Unique contributions. Because there is something for everyone, each student feels that he is learning something which he can share that is inque. This often encourages a student to participate in class and in group discussions because he feels he has a worthwhile contribution to make. When a student reads a book on a particular subject, he becomes, in a sense, a "mini-expert" on his special area and feels that he has something unique and worthwhile to share. By using trade books, there will also be a variety of author's viewpoints and students can share and debate these various viewpoints about a subject. In contrast, when students all read from the same textbook, the same chapter, the same page and perhaps even the same section, they all have the same information. It is difficult to listen to others tell about something which is common knowledge to the entire class.

Because trade books offer both teachers and students many uses and benefits, they can be used as a basic learning tool in the content areas and can help make learning more personal and meaningful.

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